

EASTER EGGS

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The coloring of eggs is nearly as old as the egg itself and antedated Easter by a great number of centuries. The egg was a symbol of birth and rebirth. With it went a tremendous number of superstitions and to it were attributed a great number of curative powers as well as auguries. The belief in its powers existed among Christians and non-Christians the world over. The very ancient among the Europeans and among many present day Orientals, particularly in India, Indochina and Indonesia, the egg was and is believed a power able to combat the evil spirits. The ancient Romans rotated an egg around an ailing person, believing that all ill was thusly drawn into the egg. That egg was then placed on a cross-road where evil spirits held sway. If any unfortunate person happened to step on such an egg he became possessed by that evil spirit. Among the Byelorussians of the very recent past this custom still existed. Special "medicine women" rotated eggs over an ailing person, particularly those with ague (chills), and cast that egg on the cross roads. Among the Germans, in not too olden times, the egg was used for "curing" dropsey. They were wont to boil the egg in the urine of the sick person, prick a hole in the shell and place that egg in an ant hill. The French selected eggs during Good Friday and kept them until Easter Sunday then drank them raw that they may forever keep them safe from the ague. Greeks and Jugoslavs take red colored eggs to the cemeteries, greeting the departed with "Christ has risen." The egg is then buried. Among the Croatians it is still the custom to place a red dyed egg in the hands of a person who died during Holy Week. The custom of burrying eggs with the departed is ancient and was practiced among the Romans and Greeks and it probably denoted the resurrection or rebirth of the demised.

The Jews, tho they do not color Easter eggs, also use eggs ritualistically during the Passover feast. Hard boiled eggs are sliced and placed in cold salt water and eaten as one of the first courses. A hard boiled egg is also on display for ritual purposes on the Passover table.

Because of these past superstitions and rituals many new customs and a special art of egg decorating developed. Most nations seems to prefer dying their eggs in solid red. The Greeks place a red egg inside the Easter loaf of bread. They also bring red colored eggs to church which they break by hitting eggs together with their neighbor standing next to them and greeting each other with "Christos Anesti—Christ Has Risen," they then kiss that person. This act is called the Agape—Act of Love, the love for one another which Christ commanded during His Last Supper.

The foremost artists in egg coloring and who really developed of it a national art, are the Ukrainians and Lithuanians. The Ukrainians take the first and unsurpassed place, followed by the Lithuanians. After them come the Poles and others. Among the Russians, the aristocratic families often studded their Easter eggs with jewels. The Romanovs—Tsars of Russia, had such eggs of great value.

The coloring of eggs are done through three more commonly accepted processes: batique, painting and scratching. The batique process is the most demanding of attention and it requires rewaxing and redying for each additional color desired. My aunt (in Lithuania) Pranciška Skrupskas was a deft artist at this. We used to spend the whole morning of the Saturday before Easter processing eggs (Margutis). It was fun. Pots of dye water were on the floor, while on the table, a container over live coals had molten bees wax. With sharpened matches which were dipped in

EASTER THOUGHTS

One of the basic features of Christianity is the Commandment of Love. In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, no rich nor slave. Before His crucifixion He said: "This is my commandment, that ye love another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15: 12-13). Throughout the New Testament this theme prevails. But . . . alas, through the past centuries we Christians were such in name only, but not in deed. His supreme commandment remained unfulfilled and we remained a personification of bigotry. Intolerance has thus far superceded love and unjust prejudice has over-dominated sympathetic understanding. We hate others for no reason but because he is not like ourselves, merely because he is a Negro, a Jew, a Chinese, Catholic, Protestant, poor, or whatever it may be. But what did the Lord say?

"But I say unto you, love your enemies . . . for if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? . . . and if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? . . . (Mathew 5:43-47). Indeed! And because the other person is different he does not become your enemy. Let us abide in His love!

Vyts Beliajus

Linksmū Šventų Velykų

Wesolego Alleluja

Khristos Anesti

Khristos Voskresya

Pascua Feliz

Froeliche Ostern

No matter in which language, to all our Readers and Friends we wish a Happy Holy Easter.

V I L T I S

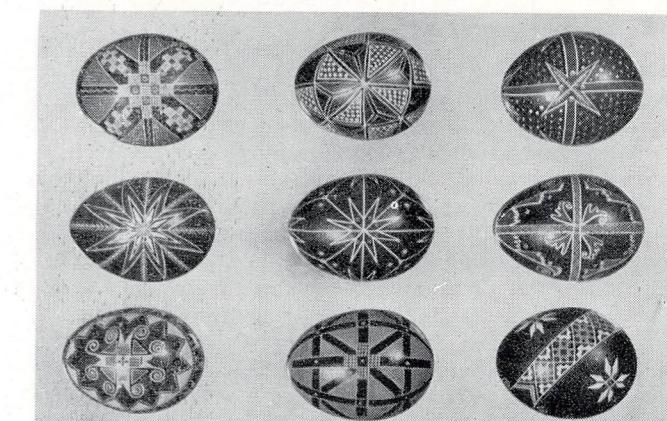
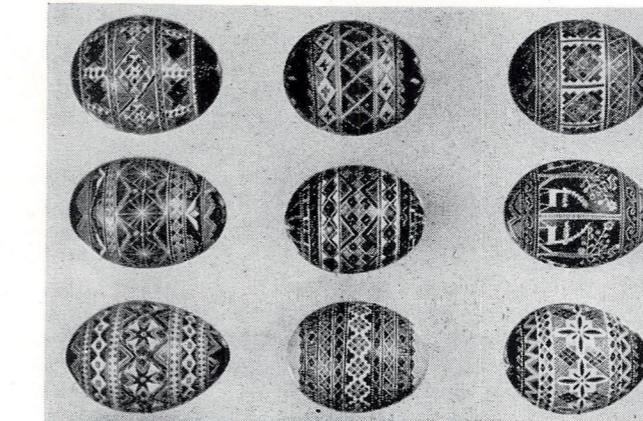
the wax we quickly made a design. It had to be quick work as wax has a tendency to cool and harden rapidly. It also required a steady hand for the quick strokes, and beforehand knowledge of the design wanted. After the designs were made it was placed in a pot of dye water and then taken out and the wax wiped off. (See the Ukrainian article for detail). Those who didn't have any dyes at home usually used onion skin (boiled) which gave the egg a rich amber color. Painting on eggs, as a national art, is next in popularity. Oil paints and a fine brush are used.

Scratched designs are fairly popular among Lithuanians and others. This truly requires artistry. The eggs are usually dyed, or lacquered, in a solid color. With a sharp tool, or knife point, designs are scratched and additional colors in the scratched places are added mostly by painting in with paints or crayon, or dying. This process requires great care so that the delicate egg shell does not break after an hour or so of work has been put in. After slaving on them all of Saturday the beautiful creations are broken and eaten during the Eastertide. Many take them to church to be blessed and then exchanged or presented to friends and family. The children have a series of games which are played with these Easter eggs. The Lithuanians are accustomed to eat the Easter egg topped with strong horseradish.

In the U. S. the Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Poles have Easter egg exhibits during the Easter season and prices given for the finest creations.

Ukrainian Easter Egg Decorating in America

Submitted by Olga Zepko



METHODS USED

Just as the preparation and process of egg decorating varies in Ukraine, so it does in this country. Basically, the principle is exactly the same. Wax is applied to the egg to protect the different areas from dyes.

One method is to use a wide (approximately 3" diameter) candle made of pure unbleached beeswax, with a thin wick. This can easily be made by melting the wax and pouring it into an opened tin can, smooth at one end. The wick—a piece of string—is first taped in place to the inside center bottom of the can. When the wax has been poured, the wick is tied to a pencil and laid across the top of the can. To remove when hardened, cut open the bottom of the can and push the candle through. Heat the bottom of the candle and fasten to a small flat plate.

Soon after the wick is lighted a puddle of melted wax forms around the flame. The "kistka", or writing instrument, is then heated in the flame and dipped into the melted candle wax. When the writing instrument has been tested on the thumbnail to make sure the wax is flowing smoothly, you can proceed to "write" the primary lines on the egg.

The position of the kistka in the hand depends upon the individual artist, but the same position in which we are accustomed to holding a pencil will probably prove most comfortable. For a smooth, even flow of wax, the brass tip of the writing instrument must be held at right angles to the egg so that the entire circumference of the kistka's tip is held against the egg.

KISTKA

A writing instrument, also known as a "pysaltse", with which the melted beeswax is applied to the egg, is a small metal cone attached to a stick. Shapes and sizes vary, but the main requirement is a pin-point opening at the end of a metal cone (or tube), through which the wax may flow. Fine chimebrass proves a good heat-retaining material to make a kistka, and is very thin and flexible. A small triangular-shaped piece is rolled lengthwise around a needle forming a cone with both ends open and a stick (preferably of willow, at least 5" long) is slit at one end, and the metal cone inserted at right angles. To secure the cone to the stick, it is wrapped with fine steel wire. Sometimes the point of the kistka needs to be filed and sanded smooth so that the entire circumference of the opening will touch the egg, thus assuring an even flow of wax. It is a good idea to keep several kistkas on hand with different-sized openings for a fine lines or for filling-in areas.

DYES

Strong chemical dyes in powder form are best when many brilliant colors are needed, as in most pysanky designs. Dyes must be effective when cool, since hot solutions would melt the wax. To dissolve the dye, however, a little hot water is added and the powder mixed until a smooth paste results. Then enough warm water to cover the egg is added to the paste. A dash of vinegar will help the color "take" better.

EGGS

Clean, white, unblemished eggs are carefully selected. Size and shape are also important factors. If it is necessary to wash an egg, soap is not used as this tends to remove natural oils which aid the dye in adhering evenly. Boiling also removes these oils and causes faded spots to appear on the finished pysanka. Therefore, raw eggs are used. Contents may be blown out of the egg when the design has been completed, but this is not really necessary since the egg will dry out in time.

DECORATING A PYNSANKA

The candle is lit and you are ready to start.

The hands must be very clean and free from oil. Hold the egg with the thumb, second, third and fourth fingers. Take up the kistka with the other hand and hold its tip in the darkest part of the flame. When the tip is hot enough, dip into the melted beeswax puddle formed by the candle. Test the top of the kistka on the thumbnail to make sure the wax will not blot, then draw a line. As soon as the wax in the kistka stops flowing, reheat, dip in wax and heat again. It is possible to make a line around the entire egg before reheating.

Rotate the egg as you work, but always be sure to keep the kistkas at right angles against it in almost stationary position, while the egg is constantly being turned in the other hand. When the lines and areas planned to be left white are detailed, the egg is carefully lowered into the first and lightest color, usually yellow. When it reached the desired shade, it is removed and dried thoroughly with great care to avoid scratching the wax. If green is to be part of the design it is usually applied with a stick to the necessary area. This is then covered with wax, because a green bath tends to dull succeeding colors. If blue is needed, it is applied by the same method to a white egg.

If orange is to be the next color, the lines, and areas are to remain yellow are drawn in with wax, the egg dipped in the orange bath, and dried. Orange is then incorporated into the pattern by sealing it with wax.

And so the process is repeated, with each color progres-